Red Cockroaches

film

'Genetic sexual attraction,' or G.S.A., is a little-known but increasingly recognised phenomenon whereby blood relations (often siblings) separated at a young age through circumstance meet by chance as adults, unknowing of their blood ties, experiencing immediate, mutual sexual attraction which can, if the two are brave enough, develop into a permanent and loving relationship. Such is the (difficult) subject of this film by one of Cuba's new wave of revolutionary visionary artists, Miguel Coyula. I say artist rather than director because, as is the case here, Coyula not only performs as director, but also writer, producer, editor, cinematographer and musical composer. As the entire creative force behind the film, *Red Cockroaches* is absolutely his creation and vision and, in keeping with the work of this new body of independent filmmakers, this digitally shot piece is a 'no budget' work, costing an astoundingly nominal $2,000, enabling him to operate outside of the artistic confines of mainstream cinema.

Coyula's vision is an uneasy one, placing his sensitive subject matter in a not too distant future characterised by prevalent ethnic concerns, iconic consumerism and an undercurrent of shadowy genetics. The frequent rainfall is acid and the titular red cockroaches scuttle largely unseen, reminding us that man's intervention hasn't completely overrun the course of nature. Though it is generically sci-fi, Red Cockroaches is in essence a love story, albeit one which cannot escape its uncomfortable incestuous bind. Adam Zarrasky (Adam Plotch), bored with the vacuous charade of his current relationship, happens on a mysterious and alluring stranger, Lily (Talia Rubel), and the attraction is instant and intense. The stiff and stilted nature of his current relationship is characterised by awkward surrealism and surface formalities. Chance meetings with Lily, however, bring relief from this existence and her free nature and sexuality sparks life and obsession in him. The course of true love, though, does not run smoothly for the Zarrasky's, as the basis of their relationship is a painful one formed of secrets and lies.

Given the subject matter, *Red Cockroaches* is not going to be to everybody's taste. Not only is the incestuous nature of the relationship demanding of the viewer, but its dark complexities means it veers through times of emotional and physical abuse. As Adam states "this is by no means the family's worst secret", we come to know that this is true, and one idea explored by Coyula is the difference between love and abuse within an incestuous relationship. Though uncomfortable, it is interesting to see the gentle development of Adam and Lily's relationship from sexual to nurturing, with fluctuating power struggles along the way. Where Adam's character is more stable, Lily undergoes some dramatic changes; initially sexually exciting, manipulative and womanly, we see her become fragile, insecure and childlike.

Visually, the film makes allusions towards ideas of nature and religion, which are handled surprisingly sensitively given the length and budget of the film. Links between sexuality and nature are strong and linked to femininity (Lily being a name with connotations of female sexuality), where religion (Adam, of course, being a Biblical name) is shown as a judgemental and hypocritical force (a priest prophesises that Adam will "burn in Hell for this", but were Adam and Eve not both God's children?) Stylistically, the budget is inevitably limiting, though Coyula adds light touches wherever possible, linking futuristic visuals to the genetic suggestion. Without the generic confines the emphasis is left on the intricacy of this troubling subject. One can only wonder at the creation of the eyes, ears and hands of this man on a big budget.

An astonishing achievement on such a miniscule budget, *Red Cockroach*es makes for challenging viewing and an unusual exploration of a difficult subject.

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